7 DOZEN MOUSE EGGS 3rd Series

National Mouse Eggs Day Issue

Claudia Lapp

LEMON RINSE

When I wore a pony tail, before the first teen cut,
my mother would wash the thick blond waves
in the kitchen sink by the western window.
Water heated to comfort, she lathered twice
then rinsed with fresh lemon juice, secret of
dazzling highlights seen on shampoo labels.

Years Later, as a high school exchange student, the ritual
was replayed in the basement of a cold water flat in Istanbul.
There my Turkish grandma heated water in a copper tub and
and doused me naked as I stood. Working up a lather of olive soap,
she made me feel at home, though I missed my mother far away.

Now, when I read poems by a mom
who divides her daughter's hair for braids,
light changing the weave as she tugs,

I feel a pang for the child I never bore.

As my own hair turns transparent

the ache lingers more.

Claudia Lapp 2016

Claudia Lapp

VISAGE : FOR MATTHEW VON BAEYER

(9/30/1932, Hamburg – 11/22/2006, Montreal)

The honesty of your gaze,
illness stripping all but what-is:
it's today, all of yesterday
drops away
A gaze directly at me,
one eye tired and tender,
the other cool, aware,
no fooling

Lips of a word carrier
lover who whispered,
your naked face
soft and strong
burns me, holds on
then lets go

At the memorial
a photo in white tee shirt
holds a face of aching kindness,
the poet grinding his ink into words:
Wait for, hope, remember, love

He left daily poems on the phone,
his spirit getting ready for wings
after brutal rounds of chemo,
quoting Neruda's *Captain's Verse:*

I do not dare/I do not dare to write it,
If you die/I shall go on living
Because where a voice has no voice
there, my voice…

10/28/2007, revised 5/2022

Claudia Lapp

LOST IN TRANSIT

Witlessly abandoned in Dresden
under a train seat of the Deutsche Bahn,
somewhere between Saxony and Bavaria,
small black satchel stuffed with gifts
nestled in a favorite cardigan,
gone for good.

Not lost via fire or flood or
buried in rubble of earthquake or war,
a moment of mindlessness suffices
to disappear my attachments.
On nights of jet lag insomnia,
cherished items crowd my head:
silk plaid shorts sensuous on thighs
acquired at a yard sale for a dollar,
mauve shawl for cool Italian evenings,
black skirt from a Capricorn friend,
wrinkle-proof, still subject to loss.

Who wears them now, I wonder –
a teen-age girl, size petite,
or her Turkish mother sweeping trains
after the last passengers?
Who drinks from my ruby Florentine goblet –
a hobo under a bridge in Prague?

In vain my hands reach for the rosary
of sea-green glass made by Benedictines,
a blue wine bottle from Vernazza,
the pencil sets in marbled paper,
a cerulean glass heart for
a sixteenth birthday,
all gone, vanished for good.

Not lost:
sunglasses, contact lenses,
car keys, passport, bank card,
home, city, country.
Not lost:
daughter, husband, best friend, cat,
a toe, kneecap, my blood,
my nerve, my marbles, the game

Just things
polished by sadness
and memory
quickly replaced by
other objects of desire.

Claudia Lapp, 2000, from *The Vehicule Poets__Now,* 2004,

ALBUM OF 3 DREAMS

Peignoir 2/23/13

In a bedroom
near the mirror
on the closet door
someone has hung
an ivory-colored peignoir,
invitation to a paramour.
Gazing at the sheer garment,
I speak aloud:
This is waiting for you.
Come and slip into it,
it will become you.

Infant Boy *1/31/13*

I get a ride with a young couple I know.
From the back seat I observe their infant boy
wrapped in a blanket on his mother's lap.
He's large for his age, his fat smooth face
the essence of contentment.
I smile to think how his life
will extend into time
well after I'm gone.

In the Lobby of an Old Hotel *2/22/13*

In the lobby of an old hotel with dark wood panels
and well-used arm chairs, I entertain
a circle of amiable guests, most strangers,
and give them a spontaneous review of a film I liked.

After taking my seat I notice a hound
sniffing at an exit door, a crack of daylight
visible near the floor.

A walk to the parking lot,
my car, dark blue, the only vehicle in sight.
Someone is near – my husband, a young man again,
peers into the window, passenger side.

Black tousled hair,
leather jacket and backpack,
adorable look of innocence
and alertness.

He gets to ride with me.

I smile at our time-travel.

Tom Konyves

SOUR SAUERKRAUT

It could be worse
It could be a repetition
of every word
in the same tone of voice
meaning

no change or transformation
no transfiguration
no smiles all around
no finger-snapping
meaning

devastation, broken vows
followed by acknowledgement
of loss

frozen faces
(echo of frozen faces)

Tom Konyves

THE CARPET OF GREAT CONSEQUENCE AND LOT'S WIFE UNCAPITALIZED

(a fragment)

We met Christopher Walken at a garage sale.
He bought a pair of red elbow length opera gloves; we, on the other hand, found a carpet of great consequence.
We unravelled our carpet of great consequence after we unfurled our long-standing flag of convenience.
On subsequent days, the carpet revealed less expected features: a long list of admonitions, hand-written and hurriedly, it appeared, directions to return to previously revealed segments and blank spaces, whose purpose we eventually deciphered at one of our weekly progress meetings.
For the time being, we were content to follow the instructions running in the vertical margins of the first series of revealed segments.
We realized that what we had was not what we thought, a carpet, but a Scroll camouflaged as such, insofar as its texture and weight were suggested to us by the previous owners.
The previous owners explained to us that, although they tried on numerous occasions, they never succeeded in opening the carpet-Scroll, due to what appeared to be a "permanent fix at the lip" which had simply fastened the roll permanently, they decided.
After that, they lost interest and were glad to dispose of what they referred to as their "great burden".

I must add that all the while the good doctor, a pillar of the community, did not let on that he was abandoning us.
When I heard, I said 'good luck to you and good luck to me'.
I was bitter but nothing like the pillar of salt he turned into, paralyzed, like Lot's wife, it was said, she too was remembered without her name.

MAI TAI MONDAY

The elephant sign shows the way
to the world of zoo. Joggers jog by.
Damp streets after rain on a Mai Tai Monday.

Doubled buses cruise by, mostly empty.
My blue mask is on my face. The notice
for the maid says Gone Surfing, but
I am bereft of surf board.

I'll walk along the edge
of Queen Kapiolani Regional Park, all the greenery
enhanced by the morning rain, an old man
getting his exercise. Roosters crow, and I remember
the spent days of my lost youth. Often
dazed by dizziness now—but let's not make
a tragedy out of aging. Others died too soon—
so don't complain about making it
to seventy.

That toddler wearing sunglasses
looks sufficiently bored. I miss
the cast of characters that last year knew.
Once again the graceless waves
come toppling to the shoreline.

Ken Norris

PARADISE EVERY MORNING

I get out here after being bruised by dreams.
It's still the happy Pacific, carefree as coconuts.

The darkness I feel is sometimes overwhelming—
so give me endless light. Ham, produce
and seafood rolling in. Anything to
distract me. Just keep telling me
that it's paradise every morning.

No mango sticky rice—they dropped it
from the menu. So no torment
like last year. The dreams of cruising food trucks
are over, and I know she's gone.

Sequels are often less interesting than originals,
and sunrise trumps sunset. The coming of the light.

Zebra doves are my pals for life. And my heart
always lifts at the sight of a red-crested cardinal.

Bird friends, I have to fly away.

POPULATE THE WAVES

Surfer boys and surfer girls are out there in the blue,
catching the frothy cresting waves and riding them.
Not many today, only just a few. Last year saw
a greater abundance—with the tourists gone,
the Hawaiian kids felt free to be themselves,
reclaimed the beach, surfing from dawn to dusk.

It's the life I never lived, but might have.
Had I been born here, not there
in New York City. I can see Melville
nodding in agreement. He was a New York boy
too, fell in love with the South Seas
like I did.

It's Artie Gold's birthday,
so of course I'm feeling a little down.
I never could convince him to come here,
or to Tahiti, or to Fiji, and the list
goes on. I always wanted to share this
with my friends, start an artist's colony
in the South Seas, find a way
to populate the waves. It never happened—
they were all so dug in to the lives they chose,
and, after a while, I gave it up too.

But returned
in later life, when the pandemic was threatening
to freeze my soul, when hiding under the bed
seemed the other best option. Hey Herman,
how about this? I sometimes say, knowing that he is
with me in spirit. And Artie is with me too,
free at last to be a surfer at twelve o'clock high.

Ken Norris

WHAT WE MADE

for Robert Hogg

Swaying cocopalms in the morning breeze.
The sun's asserting its presence in the cloudy sky.
The day develops, and my form of exercise
is the morning walk.

They're all selling their copyrights
to the corporations, they're all cashing out.

I wrote songs in the hopes of being somebody.
Later on I taught the courses that weren't
required. I found meaning beyond money.
And now I walk along the beach esplanade,
watching the waves bring an end to themselves.

The red-crested cardinals take to the sky,
and beach volleyball can't hold a candle
to the things we made.

From *Confessions of a True Believer*

1979 THE VEHICULE POETS

There are only two times I remember all seven of the Vehicule Poets being in the same place at the same time. All of the other times we were available in a representative sampling. Often there were four or five of us. And the combinations changed.

Affinities attracted us to one another and attached us to one another. The group was a swirling constellation. A quadrant of the universe. But there were no membership cards and we did not hold regular meetings. Accident played as much a part in our activities as a group as intention did.

Sometime in late 1978 or early 1979 we had an afternoon meeting of all of the Vehicule Poets at Artie's house. We were there to discuss whether or not we were really a group, and whether we wanted to go out to the world self-identified as a group in an anthology.

*

Who were the seven people who gathered at Artie's house in late 1978 or early 1979?

Claudia Lapp was 32 years old, American born. She was teaching in the CEGEPS out at John Abbott College. She had written two books, *Honey* and *Dakini.*

Artie Gold was 31 at the time, born in Brockville, raised in Montreal. His books included *cityflowers*, *Even yr photograph looks afraid of me* (Talon), and *some of the cat poems*.

Tom Konyves had been born in Budapest and raised in Montreal. He was 31 years old. His published books were *Love Poems* and *No Parking*.

John McAuley was a native Montrealer, having been born and raised in Pointe Claire. He was thirty years old. His books included *nothing ever happens in pointe claire*, *Mattress Testing* and *Hazardous Renaissance*.

Endre Farkas was 30 years old. He'd been born in Hungary, and emigrated with his family to Canada when he was 8 years old in 1956. He had published two books, *Szerbusz* and *Murders In The Welcome Café*.

Stephen Morrissey was a native Montrealer. He was 28 years old. His book *The Trees Of Unknowing* had recently been published by Véhicule Press.

Ken Norris was born and raised in New York City. At the time of the meeting he was 27 years old. His publications included *Vegetables*, *Under The Skin* and *The Perfect Accident*.

We all settled into the couch and chairs in Artie's comfortable living room and began to discuss the matter of whether we were or weren't the Vehicule Poets.

There was a lot more discussion than I thought there needed to be. Some people needed more process than others. It all went on for several hours. Eighth Vehicule poets were proposed and dismissed. Why it was seven poets, and *these* seven poets, was discussed at length.

Eventually, Artie and I went into the kitchen to cut a deal. He would stop raising objections to a group anthology called *The Vehicule Poets* if he and Claudia edited it, and if he wrote the Introduction. I was fine with both asks. Deal.

We then went back into the living room and I kept my mouth shut until he could close the deal with the others. That took another hour.

Then the deal was done. We'd all kick in some bucks, and the anthology would come out with John's Maker Press in the Fall. We were starting our migration *away* from Vehicule Press.

*

By 1979, the Editorial Board at Vehicule was coming in for a lot of criticism as to who we were publishing. Now that Véhicule Press was operational other people wanted in. As far as they were concerned, we were just publishing our friends. The press would be a lot more valuable to the literary community of Montreal if it was publishing *them*.

I am pretty sure that Simon and Guy heard this a lot. Because by 1979 there was talk of expanding the editorial board. By the end of the year there was talk of adding three editors. By 1980 we'd be receiving letters telling us our services were no longer required.

*

On a sunny day in late April or early May the Vehicule Poets, all of them, showed up late in the morning at Chris Knudsen's studio on Drolet Street. We were there to have our picture taken.

We'd asked Chris to design the cover for *The Vehicule Poets*, and he'd decided that the way to go would be a group portrait.

As the Group of Seven knew: seven is a lot of people.

There was no harmonious consistency in the Vehicule Poets. We'd just decided that, for one another, we would dull our sharp elbows.

Chris had us sit up against one of the walls in his studio. I sort of remember there being artwork (his artwork) hanging up above our heads. But it was taken out of the photograph. The picture of us that was used for the cover is just the seven of us, leaning back against a white wall, sitting on varathaned hardwood floorboards.

All the way at the right, Stephen looks the most proper. All the way at the left, Endre looks the most improper, and is mugging for the photographer. In-between, Tom and John and I are looking at the camera, and Claudia and Artie are joking around. We're all together but we're all different.

*

When Artie was working on *Romantic Words*, Joe Rosenblatt asked him for poems for *Jewish Dialog*. Artie sent him a bunch of stuff (as he was prone to do) and Joe selected the poems he wanted. When the issue came out there were all of these R.W. poems with numbers. I am *guessing* that was Artie's idea, but it might have been Joe's.

Artie gave me a copy (he had spares) and I started flipping through it, saw all of the numbered R.W.s. "Ah, I get it," I said, "R.W.--Romantic Words."

"It's also Ruby Wounds," Artie said.

"Ruby Wounds?" I asked.

Artie then started telling me about O'Hara's poem "Ode To Willem De Kooning." I looked puzzled, as I often was when Artie was philosophizing about poetry. "Just read it when you get home," he said, and moved along to another life topic, probably involving food.

When I got home I opened up my copy of *The Collected Poems Of Frank O'Hara* and found the poem. It's one of those wandering odes of O'Hara's where he is trying to show that he can do Abstract Expressionism in words. The payoff for "ruby wounds" comes at the end of the poem:

A bus crashes into a milk truck
and the girl goes skating up the avenue
with streaming hair
roaring through fluttering newspapers
and their Athenian contradictions
for democracy is joined
with stunning collapsible savages, all natural and relaxed and free

as the day zooms into space and only darkness lights our lives,
with few flags flaming, imperishable courage and the gentle will
which is the individual dawn of genius rising from its bed

"maybe they're wounds, but maybe they are rubies"
each painful as a sun

1957

*

For me, the most significant book we published in the years we were editors at Véhicule Press was Artie Gold's *before Romantic Words*. If you have a copy of this book in your library, I consider you to actually understand what's going on. If not, well. . .

When we published it, I felt like I was a member of the team when City Lights published Frank O'Hara's *Lunch Poems*. That's how momentous this book was *for me*.
And I don't understand people who don't own a copy of it and don't think it is one of the fifty greatest poetry books *ever*.

With *cityflowers* Gold demonstrated his skill as a poet. In *Even yr photograph looks afraid of me* he established his credentials as (what Bowering calls him in one of his many introductions to Gold) a "tabloid cantor." *some of the cat poems* makes a case for both his humour and his sensitivity. *before Romantic Words* just delivers the goods poem after poem after poem.

Not surprisingly, it opens with his "Sonnet" that was passed from hand to hand back in 1976. It would be a mistake to think that Artie was never in on the aesthetic wars that roiled through Montreal in pretty much every generation.

The poems of his that are in *The Oxford Book Of Canadian Verse in English* are from *before Romantic Words*. As are a lot of the other poems of his that have been anthologized. It's the book in which he is the most revealingly himself. It is one of the great books in our literature. You should read it.

What we didn't know at the time was that he wouldn't publish another book after it for thirteen years. And that book would only come into existence because I insisted that he really needed to have a Selected Poems available. After *before Romantic Words*, poetry corporal Gold went MIA for a long time.

*

The Vehicule Poets was published at the end of the summer of 1979. It was printed and bound at the Vehicule print shop. Maybe it raised a few eyebrows in-house.

The selections of each of the poets were fairly representative. Artie wrote an interesting introduction that the folks in the book are still discussing forty years on.

When Artie died in 2007, the headline of his obituary in the *Globe & Mail* referred to him as "Vehicule poet Artie Gold." That might not have entirely pleased him.

*

Louis Dudek's review of *The Vehicule Poets* didn't appear in *The Montreal Gazette* until February 16, 1980.

That Louis took the time to review the book is interesting to begin with. He could have easily passed. But he went out of his way to draw attention to it.

His review was "mixed." He said that it contained "terrific and terrible poetry." Nevertheless, he supported the "aesthetic revolution" we were promoting.

His concluding paragraph is worth quoting, for all sorts of reasons.

> Put them all together and you have The Vehicule Poets, a branch of Montreal poetry to puzzle the monophones of Canada. As Edwin Arlington Robinson said when he heard Walt Whitman read aloud, "If that's not poetry, it is something greater than poetry."
>
> Yes. It is life.

To me, that is an interesting conclusion for a High Modernist to come to.

Stephen Morrissey

A SHORT HISTORY OF SIX MILES OF THE TROUT RIVER

(Excerpts)

> From Marshall's to the Lines may be described
> as the centre of the Trout river settlement,
> for within these six miles the Americans mostly
> abounded and the first Old Countrymen took up land
> in the early 1820s.
> —Robert Sellar
> *A History of Huntingdon and of the Seignories*
> *of Beauharnois and Chateauguay* (1888)

1.

If you don't write
your own history
no one will write it
for you, or if they do
they'll describe events
not as they happened,
but changing names,
dates, places, or delete events
and people altogether,
images cut from photographs,
newcomers supplanting
the old, people who don't care
about the past but committed
to their version of truth;

now, this is what I aim to do:
write what I know
—the soul's archive—
psyche involved in all things;

not revisions of revisions
but the poetry of events,
what happens in the space
between mythology and story,
the space of history and dream
separated by a thin curtain
of being.

2.

I bought a house
in June 1979,
a house we later
named “The Cedars”,
located on Route 138
sixty miles south
of Montreal—Trout
River running parallel
to the highway
from our home
to the American border—
our home across the road
from Marshall’s school house;
the Marshall family home,
was torn down or destroyed
by fire, and a small white
bungalow built
on the site
behind which
is Marshall’s cemetery,
grave stones sinking
yearly into oblivion.
This area, at the northern
end of six miles of the river,
was once called Marshallville,
although this name

is almost forgotten,
it is where the Trout River
Post Office was located,
and where I lived
until we returned to the city
in June 1997. My time
at Trout River was spent
in domestic life,
raising my son,
paying a mortgage,
a house to maintain,
and work to keep
family happy,
write some poems,
then a divorce
and a second marriage,
finding love in middle age.
This is where I lived
those years, time allotted
to me, filled now
with memories; all of this
a part of my journey,
those years spent
in the currency of time,
for which there is no return.

3.

Never deep enough to swim far,
on summer mornings
I waded the Trout River
near the Morrison Bridge,
and when the water was waist deep
I plunged in and swam underwater,
inches from the sandy river bottom.

The Trout River flows north
from the Adirondack Mountains
in New York State
then crosses the border
into Quebec, and when it rains
in the mountains,
the current changes
from being hardly noticeable
to a rushing torrent
eroding the river's banks
and flooding adjoining fields;
trees, branches, and leaves
collect where the river curves
and sand bars form
until the next big rain,
in a month or next year,
sweeps them away
overflowing the steep eroded banks.
Mrs. Robert Ford,
who settled here
in the fall of 1828
tells us, *The banks*
of the Trout River
were different from
what they are now,
being green and grassy.
Cutting down trees
removed the roots
that preserved their
shape, and the water
washing away the loose
earth, the banks gradually
became as they are now,
broken and unsightly.

Not "unsightly" to me,
the river was a place

of peace and quiet:
the Trout River
(where, Robert Sellar writes,
trout or salmon never swam)
and where in summer
I'd sit on a lawn chair
propped uneasily
on a large flat rock
in the river—maybe the river was
fifty feet wide and three feet
deep at that point—and I'd watch
red-finned suckers gather,
yard long fish
swimming around
where I sat, looking up
at me, mouths emerging
from the water
making sucking noises;
I'd stand on this rock
doing exercises,
turning at the waist,
bending, and turning again,
thinking of the inevitable
decline of the life
I was living, and fish
observing me, a foreign
creature, of no importance
in their scheme of things.

The field
behind the house
of our neighbour
Donalda Smith,
rented out to a local farmer,
his crop of cow corn
grown with pesticides
and chemical fertilizers;

I watched the barren
fenced-in acres
from my bedroom window
when the field lay fallow,
year after year,
only a few patches of weeds
would grow, the earth depleted.
James Marshall,
who once lived across the road
from Donalda's property,
recalls living here in the 1820s: *Our crops*
for many years were splendid.
A stook, 12 sheaves, gave
a bushel of wheat. Deer
were plenty, and in
the morning we often
found them with
the cattle.

Stephen Morrissey

STARTING OUT FROM VÉHICULE ART

With thanks to Klara du Plessis who got me
thinking about the old days at Véhicule Art Gallery

1

The mission of Véhicule Art Gallery was primarily the exhibition of contemporary visual art, including conceptual art, installations, photographs, drawings and paintings, and the artists that exhibited there came from across Canada, the United States, and other countries. That was the gallery's main focus: exhibiting avant-garde contemporary and experimental visual art

My impression, even at the time, was that the people who founded and then ran the gallery, a collective of mostly English-speaking Montreal artists, were surprised that poetry could be as popular as it turned out to be; every Sunday afternoon at 2 p.m. the gallery was full of people there to hear poetry being read or performed, and this was good for the gallery. Poetry readings increased the number of events they held and the number of people who came to the gallery. This also greatly benefitted poets who had a space in downtown Montreal where they could hold poetry readings.

Somehow, out of the poets who visited the gallery, whether by propinquity or chance, a group of us became friends and this group became known as the Véhicule Poets; we are still friends over forty years later. The Véhicule Poets are a direct result of Véhicule Art Gallery; Véhicule Art Gallery was the institution and the physical location that gave us the opportunity to meet each other, publish together, and to organize poetry readings at the gallery. The gallery wasn't our beginning as poets but it was the hub, the place that brought us together; that time at the gallery has become an essential part of our individual history as poets.

The Véhicule poetry reading series came into existence after the reading series at Sir George Williams University had ended; however, the readings at Véhicule Art continued a tradition of promoting contemporary poetry similar to that of the SGWU series. I remember Al Purdy's reading, some black and white photographs I took of Purdy reading at Véhicule are in my literary papers at Rare Books and Special Collections at McGill University. I remember Robert Kelly's reading, with his wife recording the reading sitting in the front row of the audience. I brought in Clayton Eshleman, he read at Véhicule Art and at Champlain Regional College where I was teaching, I think that was in early May 1978. I also brought in The Four Horsemen, to Véhicule and to Champlain Regional College; there are many slides I took of bpNichol and The Four Horsemen in performance in my McGill papers; anyone interested in The Four Horsemen would benefit by checking out these many slides of the group performing. I remember Kenneth Koch's reading and speaking on the phone with Anne Waldman about her reading at Véhicule; Anne Waldman had known Claudia Lapp at Bennington College in Vermont.

Along with the others, I was at the gallery every Sunday afternoon for the readings and for other events. I remember when the whole group of us, that would be Artie Gold, Ken Norris, Claudia Lapp,

John McAuley, Endre Farkas, Tom Konyves, and myself, met one afternoon at Bob Galvin's apartment on St. Mathieu Street (Bob Galvin was a friend of Ken Norris). We read a few poems and I remember Artie correcting someone, it was me, on my pronunciation of "Orion". But there was another more important meeting, it was to discuss if we wanted to be considered a group, an umbrella for the seven of us who had similar ideas about poetry and who shared a common history at Véhicule Art Gallery.

We met on the evening of 1 February 1979 at Artie Gold's home; I guess we were all in attendance. Ken wanted us to accept what was already a fact, that we were a group called the Véhicule Poets. Ken was writing his dissertation at McGill on Canadian modernist literature, more specifically on little magazine publishing in Canada; several groups of poets came out of publishing little magazines, the Contact poets, the First Statement poets, and others. Ken could see the advantage of being in a group as well as being individual poets; that is, the historical context of seven poets who shared a common bond. But three of us didn't agree; Artie, Claudia, and I opposed the idea of the group. All we did, I said, was organize poetry readings at Véhicule Art Gallery. Ken, Endre, Tom, and John agreed to the name. Dissension continued as to "what & who & why & wherefore" regarding the group and the name; Tom Konyves assured me that Ken would work to justify accepting the group name. I am not sure if this was the meeting when we decided to publish our first anthology, *The Véhicule Poets* (1979), edited by John McAuley. Then came Artie's condition for accepting Ken's proposal, it was contingent on allowing him to write the introduction of the anthology, "saying just what & if we are or exist." I was very skeptical, I thought "so the 'Véhicule Poets' will make their appearance even tho no such creature exists—& Artie and Claudia and I know so—". Looking back on it I see that Ken was right, I am glad he persisted in defining us as the Véhicule Poets.

2

Véhicule Art Gallery opened on 13 October 1972. As far as I know, Guy Birchard, Artie Gold, and I organized the first reading at the gallery and it occurred eight months after the gallery opened, on 24 June 1973; the readings organized by Claudia Lapp and Michael Harris came a few months later, in the fall of 1973. Guy Birchard introduced me to Artie Gold and I often visited Artie on Lorne Crescent in the spring and summer of 1973. I remember putting up posters with Guy for the 24 June reading. I invited Richard Sommer; Guy Birchard invited Cam Christie; Artie Gold invited Glen Siebrasse and Joan Thornton; and the three of us also read. Joan Thornton was a talented poet and it is unfortunate that she decided not to attend the reading.

Here is my diary entry, the writing of a young poet at the beginning of things, just a few hours after the reading:

> Sunday/June 24th/'73—
> (20:25) about 30 to 40 people showed up—not many but a nice feeling to it—Joan Thornton phoned Artie earlier to say she wldnt/ show, one guesses she was too nervous—so Artie read and he was really good, he had one poem which really knockt me out—("my mother's cunt is a fork, she picks yams out of bottles" with the idea of her marrying men she puts up in bottles)—then I read and it was a few poems I collected last nite & didn't bother to rehearse or even read them over too much before I read (not in this order), "meditation 1", "oldman oldman oldman", then in the middle of the reading "regard as sacred" with Guy; I began with "Shaman on the back of a grizzly", I threw in my "Van Gogh" poem—so that went well & as I sat down Artie wrote a poem about my reading which I cldn't make out because of his handwriting and Anne [Heany] askt for a copy of "meditation 1"—

The reading on 24 June at Véhicule was only my second reading; the first time I read my poems in public was two months earlier, in April 1973, at Karma Coffee House, located in the basement of the SGWU Student Union building on the south-west corner of de Maisonneuve Bouvelard West and Crescent Street. Again, it was Guy Birchard who invited me to read on that occasion and both Artie and Guy were in the audience. The first reading I gave at Véhicule was in 1973; I gave readings every year at Véhicule Art, and my last reading there was in 1980. In fact, I am surprised at how many readings I gave in those years, at Véhicule Art, Powerhouse Gallery, and other venues, for the most part these were solo readings which are rare today, group readings bring in an audience. Louis Dudek told me that in the old days it was only prominent poets—W.H. Auden, T.S. Eliot, and others— who gave readings, most poets never gave readings unless they achieved something substantial in their literary work. In the late 1970s I was part of a group reading at the Unitarian Church on Sherbrooke Street West, the beautiful church that burned down, invited by Louis to read with him and several other poets. It was hosted by the owner of Mansfield Book Mart.

3

One of my English professors at SGWU was Richard Sommer; Richard told me that he and his wife had driven to Vancouver in their van around 1969-1970, where they met and were impressed by West Coast poets and artists. I know he participated at the Charles Olson Memorial Poetry Reading in Vancouver, in March 1970, just three months after Olson's passing. Previous to this Richard was probably fairly conservative; he was an academic, his Ph.D. was from Harvard (he gave me a monograph, *The Odyssey and Primitive Religion* (1962), that he published and which I still have), and he spoke of meeting Robert Frost at a reception at Harvard.

In August 1963, ten years before our first Véhicule reading, Charles Olson, Allen Ginsberg, Denise Levertov, Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, and other American poets attended the Vancouver Poetry Conference; these were poets Donald Allen included in his anthology, *The New American Poetry, 1945 - 1960* (1965). A lot of other poets, not included in Donald Allen's anthology, had a similar approach to poetry as the poets Allen anthologized; some were Beat poets, others were influenced by Charles Olson's projective verse or by Black Mountain poets, there were confessional poets, concrete/visual/sound poets, poets influenced by Jerome Rothenberg's *Technicians of the Sacred* (1968), and others.

There were also important voices in Canada; these included Louis Dudek, Irving Layton, Raymond Souster, P.K. Page, Earle Birney, and Al Purdy; not to forget Phyllis Webb, Daphne Marlatt, George Bowering, Frank Davey, Lionel Kearns, bpNichol, and bill bissett. And others, for instance Doug Jones, Leonard Cohen, Pat Lowther, John Newlove, and Alden Nowlan. No doubt I have left out poets who should be a part of this list. But, still, what a great time for Canadian poetry! The SGWU poetry series recognized the importance of this cohort of Canadian and American poets by inviting some of them to read in Montreal; further recognition of the importance of these poets is evident in who read at Véhicule Art Gallery; as well, this new poetry, this new approach to poetry, influenced and encouraged the creative work of the Véhicule Poets. Of course, the formalist poets in Montreal disliked everything about new American poetry, West Coast poetry, the Véhicule Poets, and the readings at Véhicule Art Gallery; they disliked us personally; but formalistic poetry seemed pretty dull and old fashioned when compared to what was happening on the West Coast and at Véhicule Art in the 1970s.

It must have been that summer of 1973 when I used to visit Richard Sommer at his Draper Avenue home; I was 23 years old, fairly naive, and would graduate from SGWU in the fall of 1973. I

remember meeting Roy Kiyooka at Richard's home which had formerly been Roy Kiyooka's home when he lived in Montreal and taught at SGWU. Sitting together in his second floor office-library Richard helped me compile a mailing list for *what is*, a concrete poetry newsletter of experimental poetry. I edited and published fourteen issues of *what is* from 1973-1975; a few years later, from 1978-1985, I published *The Montreal Journal of Poetics*. Both were mailed out and free to the poets who received them. Whether *what is* was a newsletter or a magazine was something Wynn Francis discussed with me at her home in Montreal West. I also published my own concrete poetry in *what is* and other periodicals; that is how I first came into contact with Vancouver poets like Gerry Gilbert and Ed Varney.

The gallery welcomed and even encouraged an avant-garde approach to poetry. I learned of John Cage from Richard and the readings I gave with my first wife, Pat Walsh, were events, not readings with one person standing up and reading their poems. By 1976 or 1977 Pat Walsh and I began to call ourselves, for performances, Cold Mountain Review, after Han-Shan (from Burton Watson's translation, *Cold Mountain: 100 Poems by the T'ang Poet Han-Shan*, 1970), and we did readings together at Véhicule Art, Powerhouse Gallery, high schools, and other venues; I still remember these reading-performances, especially those given at Véhicule. They were readings of randomly chosen texts, poems read simultaneously by several voices, the purposeful inclusion of silence in a performance, and the use of randomness in texts and their performance; this also included the influence of William Burroughs and Brion Gysin's cut-up technique. A performance at Véhicule might include having the whole audience reading texts simultaneously out loud, it was a cacophony of meaningless human voices; the implications of these readings were open-ended and lent themselves to a variety of interpretations. My first reading for voices, performing my poem "regard as sacred", was with Guy Birchard at the 24 June 1973 reading at Véhicule Art.

One of the most memorable poetry performances I attended at Véhicule was by Tom Konyves who joined the gallery in 1977, it was his long poem, *No Parking*, Tom read this poem accompanied by a cellist; it was brilliant! He also had a poem entitled "Véhicule R"; see his book, *Performances* (1980). I met Tom at Vicky Tansey's dance studio, Vicky was Richard's wife and the dance studio was located behind their home on Draper Avenue; it had been a garage and was converted into an art studio by Roy Kyooka. The occasion was the launch of Bob Morrison's *Anthol* magazine, probably issue #2, published in 1973; Tom had some work in this issue. It seems to me that it was Endre Farkas who was the impetus behind us working collectively, Endre was always interested in doing collaborations with other artists, including poets, dancers, and actors. I met Endre, very briefly, at the McKay Street location of Explorations One, a two year experimental programme in which I was a student at SGWU beginning in 1969-70. I doubt I made any impression on either Tom or Endre but they made an impression on me, I tend to keep a low profile; however, I do have a good episodic memory and I am a diarist. Ken Norris arrived at the gallery around 1975 and attended the readings. For a while Pat Walsh had been one of the roommates of Ken's girlfriend, Jill, and I heard about Ken from her. Most of my relationship with Ken has been in the form of letters and E-mails, because of this I have probably had more to do with Ken than any of the others. John McAuley and I organized the reading series in 1976-1977; John was also the gallery administrator in the late 1970s. My mother worked at the Norris Building library of SGWU and some people involved or peripherally involved in literary things also worked there, for instance John McAuley's first wife, Diana Brewer; by the way, Diana Brewer's parents lived next door to Richard and Vicky Sommer on Draper Avenue and Diana's mother was a good friend of Pat Walsh before I met Pat, it really is a small world; Nancy Marrelli, Simon Dardick's wife, also worked at the Norris Building, Simon is the publisher of Véhicule Press and Nancy was an archivist at Concordia. In 1974-76 I worked at the SGWU library, in the Shuchat Building and the Hall Building library. The First Annual Spring Marathon reading was a joint Véhicule - Concordia literary

society production, held on 16 May 1975 in H-820 of the Hall Building; the Marathon readings moved to Véhicule Art Gallery for the second annual spring reading, on 21 March 1976. These readings could go on for many hours which was the intention of the reading. I think it was Tom Konyves who was behind the marathon readings; one of the last marathon readings that I attended was held in the Hall Building at Concordia/SGWU, possibly in 1980. Just for clarity, Sir George Williams University was renamed Concordia University in 1974 with the merger of the downtown Sir George Williams Campus with Loyola College in Montreal's west end.

I graduated from Sir George Williams University in the fall of 1973; then, a year later, I was a graduate student at McGill University, studying that first year with Louis Dudek, and at McGill until November 1976; only two weeks after graduating from McGill I began teaching at Champlain Regional College. I invited poets, including Artie, Tom, Endre, and Claudia to read before my classes. In addition to poetry I was interested in the writings of J. Krishnamurti and I attended his series of annual lectures in Saanen, Switzerland, in July 1973; in Ojai, California, in 1976; and in New York City in the early '80s. I got married in August 1976 and my son was born in January 1979; later in 1979 we moved to a country home near Huntingdon, Quebec, and I only returned to live full-time in Montreal in 1997. I met Carolyn Zonailo for the first time in 1991, she had published my book *Family Album* (1987) and I offered to meet her at the airport and drive her to where she was staying on the campus of John Abbott College for The Writers' Union of Canada AGM; Carolyn is from Vancouver, she founded and ran Caitlin Press, co-founded The Poem Factory press with Ed Varney, and she was one of the founders of the Federation of BC Writers; six months after the AGM she moved to Montreal and we have been together since then. Carolyn and Cathy Ford were in Montreal in May 1978 for a League of Canadian Poets AGM and met Artie Gold and possibly Ken Norris at Artie's Lorne Crescent flat.

While living near Huntingdon I became good friends with George Johnston who moved to his country home in south-west Quebec when he retired from teaching at Carleton University; George was a meticulous poet and translator, he was friends with George Bowering, Jay McPherson, Northrop Frye, Cid Corman, and George Whalley, and he had travelled in the UK giving readings with bill bissett and Susan Musgrave. Louis Dudek was a friend and, like George Johnston, he is one of my poetry mentors. I want to say that Louis and George were not simpatico as poets but they were two of the kindest people you could meet. As well, Carolyn and I spent a lot of time in Vancouver and I got to know many poets there because they were friends of Carolyn's; we also gave readings, at UBC, SFU, The Kootenay School of Writing at Artspeak Gallery, an art gallery in Deep Cove, and book stores and art galleries in the lower mainland including reading on Gerry Gilbert's radiofreerainforest. Other good friends were Ed Varney, Marya Fiamengo, Ralph Maud, Jean Mallinson, Nellie McClung, and Trevor Carolan. I used to have more poet-friends in Vancouver than in Montreal. I first visited Vancouver in late April 1976, passing through on my way home from California and Mexico; I was between flights and walked outside of the airport, it took me no time at all to fall in love with that beautiful city.

4

Poetry readings were the main literary event held at the gallery, but I would like to include other Véhicule events that were of a literary nature; other than Véhicule Press there was Allan Bealy's *Davinci* poetry magazine and then the offshoot of *Davinci* which was the Eldorado Editions chapbook series published in 1974; Eldorado Editions was named after a restaurant near the gallery. I think there were four chapbooks in all, Claudia Lapp's *Dakini*, Andre (Endre) Farkas's *Szerbusz*, and titles by Ian Ferrier and Tom Ezzy. Ian Ferrier was this young kid who aspired to be a poet, and he is

now one of the most original and prominent spoken-word poets in Canada. I included a flyer for these chapbooks in an issue of *what is*.

Another event held at Véhicule Art, a literary-dance-performance event, was presented by Vicky Tansey; she gave other performances at the gallery but one that I participated in was a dance interpretation of Gertrude Stein's novel *Ida*; I narrated Stein's text during the performance. I don't remember the date for this, maybe 1976 or 1977. Vicky Tansey also performed at Roy Kiyooka's *Poetry/Video/Text* performance at Véhicule Art in December 1973, an event I attended.

This was a time of creativity, a time of meeting people and forming friendships, of hearing new poems and poets at the readings, a time of being in a milieu of openness in the arts. This was an exciting time for some of us; it was when we were young and just starting out from Véhicule Art Gallery.

2021

Published: *Made in Montreal*, 12 September 2021.
Spokenwebblog, https//spokenweb.ca/
starting-out-from-vehicule-art/, Montreal, February 2022.
Morrissey, Stephen. *The Green Archetypal Field of Poetry, on poetry, poets, and psyche* (Ekstasis Editions, Victoria, 2022).

Endre Farkas

Introduction to Artie Gold & George Bowering Collaboration

I was looking through Artie Gold's archives at the McGill University library and came across his long lost ms. *Romantic Words*. Ken Norris and I contemplated getting it published. We agreed on asking George Bowering to write an introduction. George had written introductions to a number of Artie's books, so we expected that he would agree. What we didn't expect was what George did with the ms. He engaged in a poetic exchange with Artie's poems. He wrote his version of Artie's poems. It was an ekphrastic monologue dialogue. I know there have been poets who have done this as a one or two off. Jack Spicer comes to mind with his engagement with Garcia Lorca. But George did this with (118 +) poems. This is something unique in Canadian (perhaps in all of) poetry. Some of them are "rewrites" of Artie's poems and some are George's poems on the topic/theme. Here are four of them.

AG: A last

A last syncopated dive and our love goes down

alone,
around our knees,
like a boxer's
shorts.

GB: A last

A last syncopated dive and our love goes down

alone,
around our knees,

[like a goofy
simile].

AG: As in

As in that first mouthful of some hybrid
I am gazing at your new colour you are
wrapped in tissue like a nectarine
my bicycle rides on your surface
I hold my breath
not like the mouth dealing with celery
certainly not like the sound of me
travelling over ordinary gravel
has it rained between myself
and life
to produce you?
Your weakness embarrasses me,
displays you in a horrid light
will I have
like the radio
to pass over you
hand on the mighty dial of this world my neighbourhood?

GB: Carrying

Carrying a bucketful of commas and such,
I climbed down his poem, line by line,
my mouth full of advice, my ears alert.

So I heard the rime of travelling the gravel;
whereas, I mean, usually in surrealism
they are too busy to remember the sound.

But his ear was modest, somewhat high-bred,
Like a nicely-wrapped Chinese pear, I said,
and all he needed was a little punctuation

to introduce the lovely question, "has it
rained between my self and life
to produce you?

AG: Knot

A silverfish long & combed
has fallen on a map spread
out on my carpet floor.

It twitches, hops like something
hot in the hand, it slides the
winter sidewalks into gutters
where the map has been folded.

It is like a man with a moustache
who will not die in Germany
over & over, he will not die there.

GB: Not

Anything I write here will not
be as good as the take-down in
Artie's poem. I'd say that silverfish

dropped from his hair to the
map on that floor, but he was bald
and what's more, hopped pretty well
himself. That guy in Germany?

He was alive before any of this
happened, and he'll be around
when there isn't an insect to be found.

AG:

The temp

The temp dropt and the snow started falling
like misery or bliss into the areas formed
by streetlights and parking lots.
I wanna die with no less than fifty bucks
in my pocket/ whereas with as little as forty
I'll leave for New York.

GB:

And

And that would likely be
to go looking for Frank O'Hara.

I don't know about you
but this poem reminds me that my young friend
could write a poem
better than mine,

way better than this.

Endre Farkas

-20 CELSIUS

The sparrows teeter on the feeder
chirp and peck at the seeds.

They flit about.
There is a pecking order

The thinnest wisps of hungry
breaths rise.

January 16, 2022

GOOD DAY

-23 Celsius.
Wind chill factor -29.
Bundled up, head down
I walk past the funeral home
that will cremate me.

January 19, 2022

Endre Farkas

FRIDAY

A Russian winter snowfall.
Flakes falling like white bombs
but no one is dying.

I'm inside watching
writing these flakes
of words, feeling helpless.

I watch sparrows
flutter about my feeder
pecking and chattering.

What else can I do?

Maybe make these birds
into jets on their way to you Ukrainians
and turn their shit into missiles.

And record that on this day
I declared war on human evil.
Again.

February 25, 2022

HOPE

I buy green bananas.

May 27, 2022

A ROUNDTABLE:

Carolyn Marie Souaid interviews Stephen Morrissey, Endre Farkas, and Ken Norris about the Vehicule days and beyond

Carolyn Marie Souaid: The three of you were part of the Vehicule Poets, an avant-garde group of seven poets who hung out together in Montreal in the 1970s and 80s. Part of your legacy was a reading series (circa 1973-1978) that came into being to promote contemporary poetry. Of all the readings that took place at the Vehicule Art Gallery (61 Ste-Catherine St. W.) on Sunday afternoons at 2 pm, which one(s) stand out in your mind as a highlight and/or important event? What specific details do you recall?

Stephen Morrissey: That would be Tom Konyves's "No Parking" reading; Tom read his poem accompanied by a cellist, it was brilliant, hypnotic, engaging. There were many other Sunday afternoon readings, some readings were given in the evening, and, in fact, I'm not really sure that Tom's reading was a part of the Vehicule reading series. I remember Robert Kelly, Al Purdy, and Clayton Eshleman reading, and others, but it is Tom's reading that I remember right away as an exceptional event.

Endre Farkas: Readings were important to me for a number of reasons. It let me hear what was going on at the moment in town, in Canada, and was occasionally a window to the U.S.. It was also a reason/excuse to meet and speak with other poets and connect/network. And most importantly (for me) it was transformative in thinking about what a reading is and could be.

Alan Bealy, a visual artist member of the gallery and publisher of Eldorado Editions, asked me for a reading. I agreed. I showed up early to set up and found a note on the door. "Reading cancelled." Allan didn't show. That was his reading. A conceptual non-reading. At first, I was pissed but then thought about it and really liked the idea. The audience didn't.

Another "event" reading was Opal L Nations. He read for about two hours or an eternity. He read until I was the only one left (I think). He wanted to see how far he could push the "reader" before they moved from being passive to active participants and walked out. I had to stay to close up.

The Four Horsemen's performance was engaging sound theatre. They made me feel the sound, letters, and silences that are essential to poems. They also exposed me to collaborative creation.

Then there was Michael Ondaatje's reading among the sheep legs. This was an accidental situation. A visiting visual artist had installed a gallery full of sheep legs. There was no room to sit so the listeners had to stand among the sheep legs. I don't remember what Michael read. I just remember the environment in which he read.

And the final one was the open reading. The gallery was packed to the balcony with poets and friends. Each poet read for five minutes (not sure). At the end of their time, an egg timer went off and they had to stop, even if they were in the middle of their poem. I don't remember if they did or not. I remember Tom, Ken, Richard (Sommer), and me combining our times and reading for about twenty simultaneously. For me it was a provocation. It made me realize that "readings" were performative, a return to the oral tradition and direct engagement with the tribe, collective, and community. For me these five were the real 'Vehicule Readings.'

Ken Norris: I'm going to answer this question as an audience member, Carolyn. As a reader, there's a whole other different set of memories.

I arrived back in Montreal in January of 1975. I was the last of the Vehicules to arrive.

I am pretty sure that the first reading I attended at Vehicule Art was a reading by Robert Flanagan, a Toronto poet who was publishing with House of Anansi. He was doing a kind of minimalism that really appealed to me. But mostly I was just *taking it all in*. The space, the people, the cold. It was February, and Vehicule Art turned off the radiators on the weekends. So you had to wear your coat. It was freezing.

Next up would probably be The Four Horsemen. I *loved* what The Four Horsemen were doing. We eventually wound up doing a sound poetry album of our own: *Sounds Like*. They were great inspirers. And highly entertaining.

Al Purdy did a great reading at Vehicule in 1977 or 1978. But the reason I remember that reading is because Leonard Cohen showed up, drank coffee, and listened.

In the 1977-1978 season the organizers had money from the gallery to bring in American poets. Terry Stokes, Anne Waldman and Robert Kelly all came to read. But the reading that meant the most to me was the reading given by Kenneth Koch. To have one of the poets of the New York School come and read to us for me was a big deal. I think the way I read at readings completely changed after seeing Koch. I got *the feel* of the New York School from that reading. A few years later, John Ashbery came to Montreal and read at McGill.

The last of the readings that had the greatest significance for me was a reading by Michael Ondaatje in November of 1978. I was a big fan of *Rat Jelly*, and it was wonderful to hear those poems live.

CMS: Some of you have mentioned the impact that the most memorable readings had on you. Clearly different things rubbed off on each of you. Ken, for example, mentions the collaborative album *Sounds Like* that was inspired by hearing what The Four Horsemen were doing. I wonder if you can identify a particular detail/element you culled from one of these readings and follow the thread into a piece/writing project that you later created— either individually or collaboratively?

EF: I don't remember the timeline but I certainly know that hearing Stephen's & Pat's (Walsh) performance of "regard as sacred" and The Four Horsemen's sound theatre encouraged my incorporation of multi-voice texts in my collaboration with dancers in *Sound Bodies.* I had a one-line poem "as the breath is the journey and it is imperceptible as is the breath just breathed in and out" which they played with at the start of the piece, in the middle, and at the end. There were definite differences as they got more tired. This line was about the breath as

inspiration and expiration, as part of the life cycle. The Four Horsemen "cacophony/soundscapes" if not inspired, then liberated me to use it in the third part of *Face-Off/Mise Au Jeu*. This was a seven-voice piece that dealt with the French/English relationship in Quebec around the 1980 referendum. It reflected people talking at cross purposes at the same time and not hearing or listening to each other. It was also a bilingual piece which not only spoke of but showed in a vocal way the topic and theme. I'm not sure if my poem "Er/Words/ah" was created before or after "regard as sacred" but it certainly was in the same spirit and did appear alongside it on *Sounds Like*.

KN: I would say that having "direct contact" with two New York School poets (Koch and Ashbery) completely changed everything that I did, and how I did it. Frank O'Hara was the great inspiration, but Frank O'Hara wasn't around anymore. But his brothers-in-arms were. Ashbery's poetry has never done that much for me—but the *tonality* appealed to me. And Koch's poetry was much more in my wheelhouse, that combination of flippant and serious. A lot of my poetry has that. Hearing Kenneth Koch read was the next best thing to hearing O'Hara read. Eventually I heard tapes of O'Hara reading, but much later.

SM: Not sure that any poetry reading had this effect on my writing – "a particular detail/element you culled from one of these readings and follow the thread into a piece/writing project that you later created" – and I went to a lot of readings in the old days. What changed my writing, what was an epiphanous experience that changed what I was writing, was derived from what I was reading. But here is the thing, from going to poetry readings I learned my test of poetry, the test of poetry is when I heard someone read their poems did it make me want to write so that at least temporarily I was under the spell of that poet's work, and I would go home from their reading and I would write my own poems because that poet inspired me to write, that poet communicated the spirit of poetry, the Muse was present. This is the test of what differentiates real poetry from fake/bad poetry, does it inspire you to write, and then do you as a poet eventually find your own voice, not just copy someone else's style?

CMS: Whether inspired by the ongoing readings in the Vehicule Art Gallery or something else, all three of you published fairly early in your writing careers. How did that come about?

KN: At the age of twenty-one I was in Montreal for close to a year, doing an M.A. in English at Concordia. My thesis was all about Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald. After my thesis defense, I moved back to New York, to play in my band Bogart and storm the music business.

My "return" to New York in 1973 and 1974 proved to be really quite complicated. I thought I was there to conquer the music business, but I was really there to have *the* great love affair of my life.

Neither mission turned out entirely as planned. Inside of eighteen months, I was in and out of the music business and in and out of love. Never to be quite the same person again.

But what's relevant to what comes after this stay in New York is this: I started collaborating with visual artist Jill Smith, who was living up in Montreal.

Jill and I began a love affair during the last two months I was in Montreal in 1973. She was looking for a way to get out of an unhappy marriage, and I was the way. In the way that lovers do, we started sharing interests and enthusiasms. One day I read her a poem entitled "Sweet Potato" that I'd written in Montreal around the time of American Thanksgiving. Perhaps a week later she came over to my place with a few drawings of asparagus that she had done. And so my first book, *Vegetables*, was born.

It's always been the common assumption that I wrote a bunch of off-beat poems about vegetables, and then Jill did the illustrations. What happened more often than not was that Jill did a drawing, and then I illustrated the drawing by writing a poem.

When I moved to New York we continued to see one another, and the project began to grow. She'd bring copies of drawings to New York when she came to see me, or I would see them in her studio on the occasions I was visiting her in Montreal. The poems and drawings circled the relationship.

It was a strange way of backing into a first book. I thought I was working as a songwriter while, over a period of about two years, I was writing the poems for my first book. Jill collected the poems and drawings and curated the project.

On a visit to New York in late 1974, Jill told me that our book had been accepted by a publisher.
What book? I asked. She told me that *Vegetables* was now a book. And she told me that Vehicule Press in Montreal would be the publisher. The book came out in March, 1975 when I was still twenty-three years old. I turned twenty-four a few weeks later. By then I was living in Montreal.

EF: I had just come back to Montreal from my year and a half stay on Meatball Creek Farm Commune in the Eastern Townships because a Creative Writing MA Program had just opened up at Concordia and my undergrad professor, Richard Sommer, invited me to apply. I was accepted. A year before my thesis (a manuscript of poems) was due, I went to Hungary for my cousin's wedding. While there, I began what became my first book *Szerbusz*. As most of my friends and some readers of my novel *Never, Again* may know, my parents and I fled Hungary during the 1956 uprising. That experience and my return became the topic and theme of my book. *Szerbusz* is a word (Latin origin) used in Hungarian as a greeting and for leave-taking. Since I had no choice about leaving nor a chance to say goodbye when we fled, I found this word appropriate. In this book, I said hello and goodbye to my birthland. On my terms. I pretty well had the manuscript finished when I came back. It was around this time that I became involved in the Véhicule world and there met Allan Bealy. He was an original member of the gallery and was also publishing DaVinci, a multidisciplinary magazine. For some reason that I don't remember, he decided to publish four chapbooks, Claudia Lapp's *Dakini*, Tom Ezzy's *Arctic Char in Grecian Waters*, Ian Ferrier's *From Yr Lover Like an Orchestra* and my *Szerbusz*. I didn't go looking to get published, it just happened because (I like to think) that it was good but also because I happened to be at the right place (Véhicule), meeting the right person at the right time. I do remember the book came out before my MA defense which caused a bit of a kerfuffle because – I didn't know – an MA thesis had to be unpublished. They finally agreed to accept it and I graduated with an unpublished and published version of *Szerbusz.*

SM: My first published poem was in our high school literary magazine and my first chapbook, co-authored with Ron Newton, was *Poems of A Period*, published in 1971. I don't remember how it came about, maybe Ron, who was a friend in high school, suggested we do a chapbook together, assuming we knew what a chapbook was, or maybe we agreed to publish some poems together for some other reason. Another high school friend, Stratos Mahmourides, typed the poems and maybe he had it printed, all I remember is going to bookstores with Ron and asking if they would sell the book. I remember Mr. George at Argo Book Store, he took several copies and years, or decades later, they were still on a rack with other chapbooks at the rear of his store... What I find interesting about *Poems of a Period*, and I suspect this applies to other poets, is that my concerns as a poet, themes that I continue to return to even now, are in that first published work written in the late 1960s and published in 1971 when I was just beginning as a poet. The themes are family, memories of family, the ancestors, themes and concerns that are containers for emotions. Read a poet's first poems and you'll see the beginning of a poet's concerns, it's a continuum that goes from the beginning to the middle and now, for me, the last poems I am writing. And then, two years later, in 1973, I met Guy Birchard who introduced me to Artie Gold that spring, and the three of us organized the first poetry reading at Vehicule Art Gallery for June 1973.That was the same year I took a creative writing course with Richard Sommer at SGWU. And then, the next year, after I graduated from university and I was working in the library at SGWU, in the Shuchat Building, I was looking up book titles in different universities on a computer and, of course, I typed in *Poems of a Period* and there it was, at the John Robarts Library at the University of Toronto (I still have the original print-out of this), and just now, on April 30, 2022, I see *Poems of a Period* is catalogued in the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto. It's a lot of work being a poet, you have to begin when young if you want to get the work done. Here is a link to a facsimile of *Poems of a Period:*

https://archive.org/details/POEMSOFAPERIODCHAPBOOKBYSTEPHENMORRISSEY/mode/2up

CMS: The 1970s saw the proliferation of a number of oddball magazines (What is, Maker, Hh, Everyman His Own Football, CrossCountry, Mouse Eggs, etc.). Many seem to be the antithesis of what we think of when we think of a literary

magazine. What were some of the magazines you were involved with and what was the idea behind them?

SM: When you're young and a poet you might want to do more than write poems, you might want to get involved with other poets, organize and give readings of your work, meet and know other poets, get in touch with other poets. The main thing, other than writing poems, is knowing other poets and being a part of a community; poets write in isolation so you want some kind of a social aspect to being a poet. That's why, in 1973, I began "what is", a folded and mailed out "magazine" of concrete poetry. There weren't a lot of concrete poets around and I wanted to be in touch with other concrete poets. I was never interested in selling "what is", I wasn't trying to make money or appeal to a general audience, that's why I mailed it to like-minded poets. I always wrote a lot but I needed an audience for this work, and I included some of my own concrete poems in "what is". There was no internet so "what is" was photocopied and mailed out, I still prefer little magazines to be printed, there is a special quality to a hard copy of a literary magazine, years later you find a copy of a poetry magazine on a bookshelf and you to get a glimpse and a feeling for when the magazine was published. A digital magazine is different, they can look very professional while poetry magazines were usually pretty amateurish affairs, but that was part of the ambience and attraction of these magazines. These old print magazines are archives of what was happening in poetry in the past, they can't go offline and instantly disappear, they aren't as ephemeral as digital magazines, and sometimes you find the first published work, sometimes the forgotten work, of a now well-known poet and that is always exciting.

EF: I agree with Stephen that writing is a solitary affair, though we (a few of the Vehicule Poets) got into collaborative writing, performing and videopoeming. I also agree that a magazine is a way to break the solitude. It’s a way of meeting other people who are interested in sharing though I didn’t think these thoughts when I first ventured into magazine making. I had never seen any alternative magazine, so I didn’t know what it was supposed to look like or what it should have in it.

My first venture into “little magazines” (pre-Vehicule Days) was after my first or second year of university. I don’t really remember how it came about or who thought about doing it or why, but I do know that I ended up being the publisher,

production team, and distributor. It was called *Ostrich* (contrary to the popular myth, ostriches do not bury their head in the sand when scared or frightened. They can sense danger before other creatures and give warning). The magazine was a primitive looking mélange of poetry, prose, essays, music reviews, political analysis and some irreverent cartoons by friends and friends of friends. Our big scoop was getting in to see John Lennon and Yoko Ono when they had their bed-in at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel. Lennon wrote a note congratulating us on doing our mag and even let us have one of his poems (not very good). *Ostrich* lasted only four or five issues but it gave me a taste of having control and the freedom to do whatever I wanted because I had the means of production.

We printed about 50 copies and sold them on downtown street corners for $0.25. I even got invited on to the local TV station's "Like Young" programme to talk about "hippies."

KN: Literary magazines can be a lot of different things. *The Malahat Review* is one kind of literary magazine, and *Mouse Eggs* is another.

The magazines I was involved with - *CrossCountry, Mouse Eggs, Everyman His Own Football* -were all expressions of community. And they all defined "community" in different ways. *CrossCountry* applied itself to the North American poetry community. *Mouse Eggs* was mostly about the community of the seven Vehicule poets. *Everyman His Own Football* was an expression of the community of two poets: myself and Tom Konyves. There was one issue of Dada ramblings, and that was it.

CMS: In his introduction to The Véhicule Poets anthology (Maker Press, 1979), Artie Gold wrote that he "would not like to see perpetuated…any mythic understanding that bonds exist between these poets greater than common sympathy arising from the shared perplexities of the Montreal english (sic) lifestyle." He went on to state, in no uncertain terms, that "Not as one, then, do we present ourselves, but, AT ONCE." Can you speak to the reasons why there was some resistance to calling yourselves a group and why, eventually, the name stuck? How did being a Vehicule poet impact your writing career?

EF: The simple reason for resistance, I think, was the fact that our art made us internally, if not externally, solitary creatures. We did our “job” alone, by ourselves. We really didn’t have anyone, nor did we want to, to call on someone else to share our pleasure/pain of making. It’s probably also true of creators in the other arts. So spending so much time alone, in our own country of one, we didn’t easily occupy the “collective.” And yet, I think we craved to be a community. Maybe this was more the case in a schizophrenic place like Montreal/Montréal.

I was more ready than some of the others to be part of a team. Maybe that was an extension of my experience and enjoyment of playing team sports. A good team consists of individuals with different strengths coming together to succeed. It also covers weaknesses and offers protection. I always liked the Gold manifesto “Not as one, but, AT ONCE.” It encapsulated in a simple, precise phrase our commonality and individuality. If you read our books, you get a sense of our different, individual concerns, styles, themes and topics. So we weren’t “as one.” You look at our collective activities, then you see a shared “at once” reality. We were (most of us) willing to collaborate to organize readings, run presses and magazines, and participate in each other’s “off the page” performances.

I think, we are more recognized as members of a group rather than as individuals. This has its blessings as well as its curse. I’m pretty sure, I wouldn’t have done some of the things that I did if I had not been part of the Vehicule Poets.

Ken, I leave the history of our moniker to you.

KN: Whatever quibbles or reservations Artie had I didn't have.

I have always said that "the Vehicule Poets" could have just as easily been called The Artie Gold Fan Club. We were all fans of Artie's poetry, including Artie.

But the gallery and the reading series made us "AT ONCE." We were all there, and we were all there together.

Did being a Vehicule Poet "impact my writing career"? I have never thought in careers, so maybe there is that. I probably thought more in terms of "a

community of creativity." There was always someone to show my work to that wasn't critics or readers—it was peers. I think that's a pretty significant gift.

SM: When we decided to present ourselves as a group, at a meeting at Artie Gold's home in February 1979, Artie Gold, Claudia Lapp, and I were opposed to the idea; we questioned the basis on which the group was being formed, some of us reasoned that we were individual poets, not a group, and we didn't need to be a group to organize poetry readings at Vehicule Art Gallery. Of course, poets are still individuals even if they belong to a group. At this time Ken was working on his Ph.D. at McGill, with Louis Dudek, and Ken must have seen the advantages of being in a group, he had greater long term vision than the rest of us, he also had historical perspective. Looking back on it, Claudia and I were right to hesitate but we were also right to agree to the group idea; Artie agreed but only if he could write the introduction to *The Vehicule Poets* (1979), an anthology of our work. It's not uncommon in Montreal for poets to gather in groups, the Montreal Group in the 1920s, the Preview and First Statement poets in the 1940s, and others. There was also the precedent of the TISH poets in Vancouver, we had invited several TISH poets to read at the gallery. As a group we are part of a continuum that has historical meaning and relevance. Groups have to form organically, they form from the conditions in which the members of the group find themselves, and groups can be based on different things. The Vehicule Poets were based on an openness to creative expression; inclusion and not exclusion; contemporary Canadian and American poetry; organizing poetry readings at Vehicule Art Gallery; friendship that has lasted almost fifty years; and occasionally publishing work together.

CMS: I'd like to follow up on Stephen's final point that some of the glue that held the Vehicule Poets together involved "publishing work together." What feelings, if any, come up for you given that you are now, in 2022, bringing out and launching books together for the first time since 1978? Is there any residual nostalgia for the past? Does this occasion spark ideas or an interest in any future collaborations?

SM: You never know what will happen in the future; who could have imagined what we'd be doing in 2022 back in 1975, or even in 2010? Launching these three books together is a bit of a surprise, I didn't know about Ken's Ekstasis book until

a few months ago and I learned of Endre's book after that. Richard Olafson, the founder and publisher of Ekstasis Editions, tells the story of living on Saturna Island, one of the Gulf Islands, back in 1982 and that my wife Carolyn Zonailo gave a reading that inspired Richard to begin Ekstasis Editions. Carolyn is Richard's hero but Richard is our hero! One thing leads to another, we build on the past. Richard has excelled at publishing translations of French Canadian writers into English as well as publishing English-speaking Montreal poets. Carolyn always says that Richard is a saint, to have published continuously for forty years despite the vicissitudes of the publishing industry is a real achievement. Richard Olafson is what a good publisher should be, someone who takes chances, who has vision, and who gives writers an opportunity to publish their work. About any future Vehicule poets' collaborations, that will happen if the opportunity presents itself and no one knows what the future holds.

KN: Back in 1978 we all published books with Vehicule Press. It was *The Trees of Unknowing* for Stephen, *The Perfect Accident* for me, and the second printing of *Murders in the Welcome Café* for Endre. We were all in our twenties.

Now we are in our seventies, and we all have books out with Ekstasis Editions. We've been friends and "poetry pals" for close to fifty years.

That it's "all come round again" exceeds the bounds and parameters of nostalgia. In a way, it completes the journey.

EF: Serendipity is all. What are the odds that three young men, one born in the Bronx (New York), one in NDG (Montreal) and one in Hajdunánás (Hungary) would be turned on to poetry, end up, at once, in Montreal at Véhicule Art Gallery, meet, like each other and publish at the same time? Once in 1978 and once, 47 years later. Serendipity, such a strange word, coined by Horace Walpole after coming upon it in an ancient Persian fairy tale *The Three Princes of Serendipity*. The meaning of the word, "good luck in finding valuable things unintentionally," refers to the fairy tale characters who were always making discoveries through chance. Sounds like the Vehicule Poets to me.

Biographies

George Bowering was one of the founders of TISH magazine, he has 36 books to his credit. He was the 1st poet laureate of Canada, and has a wine named after him. George has been an important influence on Canadian literature, a pioneer in opening up the colonial wilderness and one of the godfathers of the Vehicule poets.

Endre Farkas, poet / playwright/author/ was born in Hungary. He is a genre fluid writer who has published two novels, eleven books of poetry and two plays. His work has been translated into French, Spanish, Italian, and Slovenian. He has read and performed widely in Canada, the United States, Latin America, and Europe, and has created performance pieces that have toured across the country and abroad. He has also translated the poetry of Bari Karoly. His book *How To* was nominated for the AM Klein poetry award in 1983. He is the two-time winner of the CBC radio Poetry "Face Off" Competition. His collaborative book and video poem *Blood is Blood* was the winner of Zebra's International Poetry Film Festival (Berlin) 2012. His novel *Home Game* was shortlisted for the Mavis Gallant Prize for Fiction.

Born in 1947 in Brockville Ontario, **Artie Gold** appeared like a supernova within the constellation of Montreal Anglophone poets in the late 1960s. Intensely devoted to poetry, having already discovered the work of Frank O'Hara, John Wieners and Jack Spicer in his teens, six books of his poems were published in each of the years 1974-79. Daunted by asthma, complicated by rapidly proliferating allergies and emphysema, he increasingly retreated from the world. At the urging of his friends, a *Selected Poems* was published in 1992, but only one further book appeared in print in 2003. The Collected Books of Artie Gold was published in 2010. Artie left the world on Valentine's Day, 2007.

Born in Budapest, based in Montreal until 1983**, Tom Konyves** is one of the original seven poets dubbed The Vehicule Poets; his work is distinguished by Dadaist/Surrealist/experimental writings, performance works and videopoems. In 1978, he coined the term 'videopoetry' to describe his multimedia work and is considered to be one of the original pioneers of the form. He has published 6 books of poetry, most recently "Perfect Answers to Silent Questions", by Ekstasis Editions, Victoria, BC. In 2007, he published a novella, OOSOOM (Out Of Sight, Out Of Mind) with BookThug, Toronto. Konyves has initiated many public poetry projects, including Poésie En Mouvement/Poetry On The Buses (Montreal, 1979), Performance Art in Quebec, a six-hour TV series (Cable TV, 1980), Montreal's first Concrete Poetry Exhibition (Vehicule Art, 1980), The Great Canadian Poetry Machine (Vancouver, Expo 86). He curated the screenings of videopoems at The Text Festival (Bury, England, 2010) and at the Montpellier Poetry/Translation/Film Conference (2015) and has given numerous poetry performances. Since 2006, he has developed and taught courses in screenwriting, video production, creative visual writing and journalism at the University of the Fraser Valley in Abbotsford, British Columbia.

Born in Germany in 1946, **Claudia Lapp** earned a BA from Bennington College in 1968 and moved to Montreal the same year. She pursued graduate courses at McGill and taught at John Abbott College English Department, which led to publishing as one of the Vehicule poets. Since returning to the States, Claudia has been a teacher in writing and arts communities. She has lived in Eugene Oregon since 1991. Has given readings in Vancouver BC and Montreal, including in 2004, for Cabaret Vehicule performance at Place-des-Arts. In 2018, she shared the stage with Vehicule poets at their 40th anniversary reading at McGill Library Rare Book Room and the Blue Met Festival. Recent publications include *BUCH*, 2013, *Color Quartet*, 2018, and *pan/de/mik/2020*, an anthology of pandemic poems, 2021.

Stephen Morrissey, a Montreal-born poet who has published over a dozen books of poetry. He was one of the seven Vehicule poets, who were the avant-garde in the 1970s. *The Green Archetypal Field of Poetry: On poetry, poets, and psyche* is his second book of critical writing on poetry.

Ken Norris was born in New York City in 1951. He came to Canada in the early 1970s, to escape Nixon-era America and to pursue his graduate education. He completed an M.A. at Concordia University and a Ph.D. in Canadian Literature at McGill University. He became a Canadian citizen in 1985. For thirty-three years he taught Canadian Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Maine. He currently resides in Toronto.